

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE ON IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AMONG EFL UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching experience is widely recognised as a pivotal driver of professional identity formation among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) educators, yet its differential effects across career stages remain undertheorised in non-Western contexts. Drawing on Wenger's (1998) communities of practice and Huberman's (1989) teacher career cycle, this narrative inquiry examines how accumulated years of classroom practice shape the identity construction of three Vietnamese EFL university teachers at Thai Nguyen University's School of Foreign Languages. Through narrative interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis, the study explores how pedagogical confidence, professional self-concept, and institutional positioning evolve with experience. Findings reveal that novice, mid-career, and veteran teachers construct markedly distinct professional identities, mediated by Vietnam's collectivist culture, non-native speaker dynamics, and reform-driven educational policies. The study addresses a critical gap in EFL teacher identity scholarship by foregrounding experience-driven identity trajectories in a Southeast Asian setting, offering implications for differentiated teacher education and mentorship design globally.

Keyword: *EFL teacher identity, teaching experience, professional identity construction, narrative inquiry, communities of practice, Vietnamese EFL*

1. INTRODUCTION

The professional identity of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers constitutes a dynamic and multidimensional construct, continuously shaped by the intersection of personal histories, institutional contexts, sociocultural norms, and, critically, the accumulation of professional experience over time. Within the landscape of educational research, teaching experience has long been acknowledged as a transformative force that influences how educators perceive themselves, enact their professional roles, and navigate the complex demands of classroom life (Huberman, 1989; Flores & Day, 2006). Yet, despite growing scholarly attention to teacher identity in language education, the specific mechanisms through which teaching experience shapes identity construction among EFL teachers in non-Western, collectivist societies remain significantly underexplored.

This study situates its inquiry within Thai Nguyen University's School of Foreign Languages, a prominent public institution in northern Vietnam, where three EFL teachers at distinctly different career stages—novice, mid-career, and veteran—

offer a compelling lens through which to examine experience-driven identity development. Vietnam's rapidly transforming educational environment, driven by the National Foreign Language Project (2008–2020, extended), mandates communicative and task-based pedagogies, placing unique adaptive pressures on teachers whose professional self-concepts may be deeply anchored in prior training and accumulated practice. In this context, understanding how teaching experience mediates identity construction is not merely an academic concern but carries direct implications for teacher education, institutional support, and policy design.

The study is theoretically grounded in Wenger's (1998) communities of practice (CoP) framework, which conceptualises identity as emerging through participation and engagement within professional communities, and Huberman's (1989) career cycle model, which maps the affective and cognitive trajectories of teachers across their careers. Together, these frameworks enable a nuanced analysis of how experience shapes participation patterns, professional self-concept, and pedagogical agency at different career stages.

The following research questions guide the inquiry:

1. How does teaching experience shape the professional identity construction of EFL university teachers at different career stages?
2. In what ways do novice, mid-career, and veteran EFL teachers negotiate their professional identities within institutional communities of practice?
3. How do sociocultural and institutional factors interact with teaching experience to influence identity construction and classroom practices?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Teacher Identity: A Dynamic and Contextualised Construct

Teacher identity has been conceptualised across diverse theoretical traditions as a fluid, socially situated, and continuously negotiated construction rather than a fixed, stable trait (Hall, 1996; Varghese et al., 2005). From a non-essentialist perspective, identity is understood as an ongoing process of becoming, shaped by the interplay of personal experiences, social interactions, professional roles, and contextual factors (Norton, 2000). Danielewicz (2001) defines teacher identity as the ways in which educators perceive themselves and are perceived by others within their professional roles, while Britzman (1992) draws a critical distinction between identity-reflecting deep professional commitments and values-and role, which pertains to functional duties assigned by institutional contexts.

The dynamic nature of teacher identity implies that it is subject to transformation over time, particularly as teachers accumulate professional experience and encounter new pedagogical challenges (Flores & Day, 2006). This temporal dimension of identity development remains, however, undertheorised in much of the existing literature, which tends to treat teacher identity as a cross-sectional phenomenon rather than a longitudinal trajectory. The present study addresses this gap by foregrounding experience as a central variable in identity construction.

2.2 Teaching Experience and Professional Identity Development

Huberman's (1989) seminal model of the teacher career cycle provides a foundational framework for understanding how professional identity evolves across career stages. The model identifies distinct phases-survival and discovery (years 1-3), stabilisation (years 4-6), experimentation or consolidation (years 7-25), and serenity or disengagement (years 25+)-each characterised by distinct affective states, identity configurations, and professional preoccupations. Novice teachers in the survival phase typically grapple with identity uncertainty, legitimacy concerns, and tensions between idealistic training and institutional realities (Veenman, 1984). Mid-career teachers, having achieved greater pedagogical stability, often engage in identity consolidation and active participation within professional communities (Day et al., 2006). Veteran teachers may exhibit either a deepened, reflective professional self-concept or, conversely, signs of stagnation and resistance to reform (Freedman & Appleman, 2009).

In EFL contexts, teaching experience has been shown to mediate key identity-related dynamics, including non-native speaker (NNS) legitimacy concerns, pedagogical confidence, and engagement with professional communities (Varghese et al., 2005). Experienced NNS teachers often develop robust professional self-concepts that effectively counter deficit narratives associated with NNS status, while novice NNS teachers remain particularly vulnerable to legitimacy challenges (Braine, 1999; Pavlenko, 2003). These dynamics are further complicated in non-Western settings where cultural values, institutional hierarchies, and national policy mandates interact with individual experience trajectories.

2.3 Communities of Practice and Experience-Driven Identity

Wenger's (1998) social theory of learning and identity formation provides a critical lens through which to examine how teaching experience shapes participation within professional communities. Wenger posits that identity is constituted through a dual process of identification-aligning oneself with a community-and negotiation of meaning within that community. Experienced teachers, by virtue of their accumulated participation, tend to

occupy more central, full-membership positions within institutional CoPs, whereas novice teachers occupy peripheral positions, gradually moving towards fuller participation as their experience and competence develop (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

This trajectory from peripheral to full participation has significant implications for identity construction: as teachers accumulate experience, their sense of professional agency, institutional belonging, and pedagogical confidence typically intensifies. However, Tsui (2007) cautions that Wenger's framework inadequately accounts for power dynamics within CoPs, which may marginalise certain members regardless of experience—a concern particularly salient in hierarchical, collectivist educational cultures such as Vietnam's.

2.4 EFL Teacher Identity in Non-Western Contexts

The literature on EFL teacher identity has been disproportionately centred on Western or East Asian contexts, with limited attention to Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam (Duff & Uchida, 1997). In Vietnam, the rapid expansion of English education under the National Foreign Language Project, combined with deeply embedded collectivist values and hierarchical institutional norms, creates a distinctive context for identity construction that cannot be adequately understood through Western theoretical lenses alone (Le Ha, 2008). Collectivist values emphasising duty, group harmony, and respect for authority shape how Vietnamese EFL teachers conceptualise their professional roles and navigate institutional expectations, often creating tensions with the individualistic, student-centred pedagogies promoted by national reforms.

Research on Vietnamese EFL teachers' professional identities remains nascent, with existing studies offering limited insight into how experience specifically mediates identity development within this cultural context. This study seeks to address this critical gap, contributing to a more globally representative and culturally nuanced body of ELT identity scholarship.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design: Narrative Inquiry

This study adopts a narrative inquiry design, a qualitative methodology that explores human experience through the stories individuals construct and share (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry is particularly well-suited to the investigation of teacher identity, as it captures the temporal, social, and contextual dimensions of professional self-construction that quantitative approaches cannot access. By foregrounding teachers' own narrative accounts of their experience trajectories, the study illuminates the meaning-making processes through which professional identity is constructed, maintained, and transformed over time.

The inquiry is guided by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, encompassing temporality (the past-present-future arc of teachers' professional lives), sociality (the personal and social dimensions of narrative), and place (the institutional and cultural contexts within which narratives are embedded). This framework enables a holistic analysis of how teaching experience, as a temporal variable, intersects with social and contextual factors to shape identity construction.

3.2 Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted at Thai Nguyen University's School of Foreign Languages, a key public institution in northern Vietnam actively implementing national English language education policies. This site was selected for its embeddedness in Vietnam's collectivist cultural context and its pivotal role in educational reform, making it an ideal setting for investigating experience-driven identity construction in a non-Western EFL environment.

Three EFL teachers were purposively selected to represent distinct career stages, enabling a comparative analysis of experience-driven identity trajectories. Participant A (hereafter Ms. Loan) was born in 1979 and holds the position of Dean of the English Department, with over 20 years of teaching experience. Her veteran status and leadership role provide insight into how extensive experience and administrative responsibility shape identity construction. Participant B (hereafter Viet) was born in 1995 and is a novice teacher with 1-3 years of

classroom experience. His early-career narrative illuminates the identity challenges and aspirations characteristic of the survival phase of teacher development. Participant C (hereafter Ms. Quyen) was born in 1988 and is a mid-career teacher with approximately 10 years of teaching experience, offering a perspective that bridges novice and veteran identity configurations. All three participants are non-native English speakers, aligning with the study's focus on NNS identity dynamics. Pseudonyms are employed to protect participant confidentiality.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary methods: narrative interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis. Narrative interviews employed open-ended prompts to elicit each participant's professional life story, with particular attention to how teaching experience has shaped their professional self-concept, pedagogical beliefs, and institutional positioning. Two interviews of 60–90 minutes were conducted with each participant: the first focusing on career histories and experience trajectories, and the second exploring specific teaching experiences and identity reflections. Interviews were conducted in English or Vietnamese according to participant preference and were audio-recorded with informed consent. Vietnamese transcripts were translated into English and verified by a bilingual colleague.

Participants maintained reflective journals over a six-week period, guided by prompts such as “How has your accumulated teaching experience shaped the way you see yourself as an EFL teacher?” and “How have your classroom practices evolved as you have gained more experience?” These journals provided longitudinal, real-time reflections on experience-identity relationships. Document analysis was conducted on national policy guidelines, institutional curricula and teaching guidelines, and participants' teaching materials, contextualising narrative accounts within broader policy and institutional frameworks.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Polkinghorne's (1995) narrative configuration, supplemented by Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. The analytical process involved data familiarisation through repeated reading of transcripts, journals, and documents; restorying, which reorganised

raw narratives into coherent, temporally structured accounts for each participant; and thematic coding, which identified recurring patterns related to experience-driven identity construction. Codes were iteratively refined through constant comparison across data sources and participant accounts. Triangulation across the three data collection methods and member checking with participants ensured analytical rigour and narrative validity.

4. FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings from the narrative inquiry, organised around the central theme of how teaching experience differentially shapes professional identity construction at novice, mid-career, and veteran stages. The narratives of Ms. Loan, Viet, and Ms. Quyen reveal distinct experience-driven identity configurations, mediated by institutional participation patterns, pedagogical confidence, NNS legitimacy dynamics, and responses to Vietnam's educational reforms.

4.1 Veteran Experience and Authoritative Identity: Ms. Loan

4.1.1 Experience as Institutional Authority

Ms. Loan's narrative was characterised by a strong, settled professional identity rooted in her extensive teaching experience and institutional leadership role. With over 20 years of classroom practice and her current position as Dean, Ms. Loan articulated a clear, confident sense of professional self: “Over the years, I have come to know exactly who I am as a teacher. Experience has given me the certainty to make decisions, to guide others, not just students, but younger colleagues too” (Interview, 15 Nov. 2024). This reflects Huberman's (1989) characterisation of veteran teachers as occupying a phase of professional serenity and institutional authority, in which identity is consolidated rather than contested.

Her reflective journal entries further illuminated how accumulated experience had transformed her professional self-concept from initial uncertainty to commanding authority: “I remember my early years, always wondering if I was doing enough, if students truly respected me. Now, after twenty years, I carry a different kind of confidence—not arrogance, but the quiet certainty that comes from having seen and done so much” (Journal, 20 Nov. 2024). This trajectory from identity uncertainty to

professional confidence is consistent with Flores and Day's (2006) model of experience-driven identity development.

4.1.2 Experience and Full CoP Membership

In terms of her positioning within the faculty's community of practice, Ms. Loan occupied an unambiguously central role, consistent with Wenger's (1998) notion of full membership. Her decades of institutional participation had afforded her not only pedagogical expertise but also the social capital necessary to define norms, mentor colleagues, and shape the professional culture of the department. Document analysis of faculty guidelines (2024) confirmed her role in developing institutional curricula and training programmes, reflecting the full convergence of her personal professional identity with institutional authority.

Importantly, Ms. Loan's veteran experience had also substantially mitigated the NNS legitimacy concerns that characterise many Vietnamese EFL teachers' professional self-concepts. She noted: "In my early career, I was sometimes self-conscious about my English not being native-like. But experience teaches you that what matters is your professional knowledge, your relationship with students, your ability to facilitate learning. Native speaker status becomes less important when you have the authority of experience" (Interview, 15 Nov. 2024). This finding is consistent with Braine's (1999) observation that experienced NNS teachers develop sophisticated legitimacy strategies that reframe professional value around expertise and commitment rather than linguistic origin.

4.2 Novice Experience and Identity Uncertainty: Viet

4.2.1 Survival Phase Identity Challenges

In striking contrast to Ms. Loan's settled professional identity, Viet's narrative was pervaded by the identity uncertainty and legitimacy anxiety characteristic of Huberman's (1989) survival and discovery phase. With only 1–3 years of teaching experience, Viet described his professional self as "still forming, still searching for the kind of teacher I want to be and the kind of teacher my students and colleagues expect me to be" (Interview, 10 Dec. 2024). This provisional, exploratory quality of novice identity construction aligns with Veenman's (1984) "practical shock"

phenomenon, whereby the gap between idealised teacher training and complex classroom realities precipitates acute identity disruption.

Viet's reflective journals revealed that his limited experience rendered him particularly vulnerable to doubts about his professional competence and institutional standing. He wrote: "Sometimes a lesson goes well and I feel like I am becoming the teacher I hoped to be. But then a difficult class, a critical comment from a senior colleague, and I question everything again. Experience is what I lack most, and its absence makes everything feel uncertain" (Journal, 25 Nov. 2024). The instability of novice professional identity described here underscores the critical role of accumulated experience in providing the affective grounding necessary for coherent professional self-construction.

4.2.2 NNS Legitimacy and Peripheral CoP Participation

Viet's novice status interacted with NNS legitimacy concerns in ways that further complicated his identity construction. Unlike Ms. Loan, who had drawn on decades of experience to effectively reframe NNS status, Viet described persistent anxieties about his English proficiency and professional credibility: "I worry sometimes that students compare me to teachers with more experience, or to native speakers, and find me lacking. I know I have a lot to offer, but I haven't yet had the time to prove it through my teaching record" (Journal, 28 Nov. 2024). This vulnerability to deficit narratives associated with NNS status is consistent with Pavlenko's (2003) analysis of how novice NNS teachers' limited experience leaves them exposed to legitimacy challenges that experienced colleagues have learned to navigate.

In terms of CoP participation, Viet occupied a peripheral position within the faculty, consistent with Lave and Wenger's (1991) model of legitimate peripheral participation. His journal entries and interview accounts described a sense of marginalisation from senior colleagues: "I attend departmental meetings, I observe how more experienced teachers work, but I feel I am watching from the edge rather than participating fully. My opinions are heard politely, but the real decisions are made by those who have been here for years" (Interview, 10 Dec. 2024). This peripheral positioning highlights the centrality of experience in determining one's degree of

community membership and, consequently, one's professional identity formation.

4.3 Mid-Career Experience and Identity Consolidation: Ms. Quyen

4.3.1 Bridging Novice Uncertainty and Veteran Authority

Ms. Quyen's narrative occupied an analytically rich middle ground between Viet's identity uncertainty and Ms. Loan's authoritative confidence. With approximately ten years of teaching experience, she described a professional identity in active consolidation: "I am no longer the anxious new teacher I once was. I have found my style, my approach, what works for my students. But I am still growing, still discovering new dimensions of who I am as a teacher" (Interview, 18 Nov. 2024). This characterisation reflects Huberman's (1989) stabilisation and active experimentation phases, during which teachers consolidate a stable professional self while retaining openness to pedagogical development.

Her reflective journals revealed how the accumulation of experience had progressively strengthened her professional self-concept: "In my early years, I constantly sought reassurance from senior colleagues. Now I trust my own professional judgement more, though I still value their wisdom. Experience has given me a foundation to stand on" (Journal, 29 Nov. 2024). This gradual shift from external validation to internal professional authority illustrates the developmental trajectory that Flores and Day (2006) associate with mid-career identity consolidation.

4.3.2 Experience, Research Engagement, and Institutional Identity

A distinctive feature of Ms. Quyen's experience-driven identity construction was the increasing integration of research engagement into her professional self-concept. With two recent publications and growing involvement in departmental mentoring, her narrative reflected an emerging identity as both practitioner and emerging scholar-a configuration that distinguished her from both the novice Viet and the veteran Ms. Loan. She noted: "Teaching experience has taught me to ask better questions about my own practice. That curiosity has led me towards research, which has in turn deepened my

teaching. The two have become inseparable parts of who I am professionally" (Interview, 18 Nov. 2024).

This integration of research and teaching identities represents a distinctive mid-career identity configuration, consistent with Taylor's (1999) analysis of academic identity as encompassing both pedagogical and scholarly dimensions. Document analysis of faculty guidelines and Ms. Quyen's teaching materials confirmed this dual orientation, with lesson plans reflecting sophisticated pedagogical design informed by current ELT scholarship (Document Analysis, Lesson Plan, 2024).

4.4 Cross-Case Analysis: Experience, Culture, and Identity Trajectories

Across the three narratives, a clear experience-driven identity trajectory emerged: from peripheral, uncertain, and legitimacy-anxious (Viet) through consolidating, emerging, and dual-professional (Ms. Quyen) to authoritative, settled, and institutionally central (Ms. Loan). This trajectory is consistent with both Huberman's (1989) career cycle model and Wenger's (1998) account of movement from peripheral to full CoP participation.

Importantly, however, this trajectory was consistently mediated by Vietnam's collectivist cultural context. All three teachers described their professional identities as shaped not only by individual experience but by their relationships with students, colleagues, and institutional communities, reflecting collectivist values that prioritise group harmony and hierarchical respect over individual professional agency. Gender dynamics further interacted with experience, with Ms. Loan and Ms. Quyen navigating societal expectations to balance family and career alongside their professional development, pressures that constrained available time for research and professional learning (Journal, 20–30 Nov. 2024).

National policy reforms, particularly the National Foreign Language Project's mandate for communicative teaching methods, shaped identity construction differentially across career stages: for Ms. Loan, reforms represented a challenge to established practices; for Ms. Quyen, a motivating professional development opportunity; and for Viet, an additional source of pressure in the absence of adequate institutional support

(Interviews, Nov.–Dec. 2024). These findings highlight the complex, multidirectional interplay between individual experience trajectories and broader sociocultural and institutional forces in shaping professional identity.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Experience as the Engine of Identity Development

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that teaching experience functions as a primary engine of professional identity development among EFL university teachers in Vietnam. Consistent with Huberman's (1989) career cycle model, the three participants exhibited identity configurations that corresponded closely with their respective career stages: novice identity uncertainty and peripheral CoP participation (Viet), mid-career identity consolidation and emerging institutional belonging (Ms. Quyen), and veteran identity authority and full CoP membership (Ms. Loan). These stage-specific configurations extend prior research on EFL teacher identity (Varghese et al., 2005; Johnson, 2003) by demonstrating that experience is not merely a background variable but a constitutive force that actively shapes the substance and coherence of professional self-construction.

Particularly significant is the finding that accumulated experience served as an effective buffer against NNS legitimacy concerns. While Viet's limited experience rendered him vulnerable to deficit narratives associating professional value with native-speaker status, Ms. Loan's extensive career had enabled her to develop a robust professional identity grounded in expertise, institutional authority, and relational competence rather than linguistic origin. This finding contributes to Braine's (1999) and Pavlenko's (2003) analyses of NNS legitimacy by demonstrating that experience constitutes a specific and powerful mechanism through which NNS EFL teachers can reframe and reclaim professional legitimacy.

5.2 Communities of Practice and Experience-Driven Participation

Wenger's (1998) framework of legitimate peripheral participation provides a productive theoretical lens for interpreting the differential CoP positioning of the three participants. Viet's

peripheral institutional status, Ms. Quyen's intermediate and increasingly active participation, and Ms. Loan's central, norm-defining role within the faculty CoP directly mirror the trajectory from peripheral to full membership that Wenger associates with identity development through social participation. These findings underscore that professional identity is not constructed in isolation but emerges through the concrete, experience-mediated practices of institutional belonging: attending meetings, mentoring colleagues, contributing to curriculum development, and publishing research.

The study also responds to Tsui's (2007) critique of Wenger's framework for underemphasising power dynamics. Within the hierarchical, collectivist culture of Vietnamese academia, experience does not merely reflect expertise but confers institutional power that actively structures the conditions under which professional identity can be asserted and recognised. Viet's marginalisation despite his genuine pedagogical competence and enthusiasm illustrates that peripheral participation in Vietnamese institutional CoPs is not merely a transitional stage but a potentially prolonged condition shaped by cultural hierarchies that experience alone may be insufficient to overcome.

5.3 Sociocultural Mediation of Experience-Identity Relationships

A central contribution of this study is its demonstration that the relationship between teaching experience and identity construction is not universal but is consistently mediated by sociocultural context. Vietnam's collectivist values, hierarchical institutional norms, and gender expectations interact with individual experience trajectories to produce identity configurations that diverge significantly from those documented in Western ELT research (Varghese et al., 2005; Clarke, 2008). The prioritisation of group harmony and institutional loyalty over individual professional agency, the weight of societal gender expectations on female teachers' professional development, and the unique pressures of implementing nationally mandated communicative pedagogies within traditionally teacher-centred institutional cultures all represent contextually specific factors that any account of experience-driven identity construction in Vietnamese EFL education must incorporate.

These findings address the gap identified by Duff and Uchida (1997) and Le Ha (2008) regarding the inadequate representation of non-Western contexts in ELT identity research, demonstrating that culturally responsive theoretical frameworks are essential for capturing the full complexity of professional identity development in Southeast Asian educational settings.

5.4 Implications for Theory and Practice

Theoretically, this study advances the integration of Huberman's (1989) career cycle model with Wenger's (1998) CoP framework as a complementary analytical tool for studying EFL teacher identity, offering a temporal dimension that enriches the primarily synchronic account of identity formation provided by social learning theory. Practically, the findings have significant implications for teacher education and institutional support. The acute identity vulnerability documented among novice teachers, particularly regarding NNS legitimacy and CoP marginalisation, calls for structured mentorship programmes that accelerate the development of professional confidence and institutional belonging. Mid-career teachers benefit from targeted research development support that enables the integration of scholarly and pedagogical identities, while veteran teachers require opportunities for continued professional renewal that prevent the stagnation and disengagement associated with the latter phases of Huberman's career cycle.

At the policy level, the findings suggest that educational reforms mandating pedagogical shifts must be accompanied by differentiated professional development support that is sensitive to career-stage-specific identity needs. One-size-fits-all professional development initiatives are unlikely to address the distinct challenges facing novice, mid-career, and veteran EFL teachers navigating identity reconstruction in the context of systemic educational change.

6. CONCLUSION

This narrative inquiry has illuminated the differential ways in which teaching experience shapes professional identity construction among EFL university teachers in Vietnam. Through the contrasting narratives of Ms. Loan, Viet, and Ms. Quyen, the study has demonstrated that experience functions as a foundational driver of identity development, mediating pedagogical

confidence, institutional positioning, NNS legitimacy, and CoP participation across novice, mid-career, and veteran career stages. At the same time, the study has shown that experience-driven identity trajectories are consistently shaped by Vietnam's collectivist culture, hierarchical institutional norms, gender dynamics, and national policy imperatives, underscoring the importance of culturally contextualised analyses of professional identity in non-Western ELT settings.

The integration of Huberman's (1989) career cycle model and Wenger's (1998) communities of practice framework has proven analytically productive, enabling a holistic account of identity development that captures both its temporal trajectory and its social, participatory dimensions. Future research should build on these findings through longitudinal designs that track individual identity trajectories over extended career spans, larger cross-institutional samples that capture regional and institutional variation, and comparative studies across Southeast Asian EFL contexts that further interrogate the relationship between cultural context, experience, and identity construction.

Practically, this study advocates for the implementation of career-stage-sensitive mentorship and professional development programmes, differentiated policy support for teachers navigating pedagogical reform at different experience levels, and institutional cultures that value and nurture the professional identities of teachers at all stages of their careers. In doing so, it offers a contribution not only to Vietnamese ELT scholarship but to the global project of building more equitable, responsive, and effective systems of teacher professional development.

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